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## THE ORIGIN AND FUNCTION OF THE GORGON-HEAD

THALIA PHILLIES HOWE

PLATES 35-36

MODERN investigations into the origins of the Gorgon and gorgoneion have generally evolved around two kinds of rationalism, the zoological and the cosmological. Theorists of the former group, beginning with Levezow in 1832, concluded that the Gorgon concept originated in a fear of animals, probably in North Africa, the same region that had stocked the menagerie of Egyptian worship.<sup>1</sup> In the 20th century Gerojannis and Wolters favored the lion as the source of inspiration; A. B. Cook regarded the gorgoneion as "pointing back to an Owl-Athena"; Ridgeway argued that the gorgoneion-aegis was simply a modified goat-skin.<sup>2</sup> Zell and Facius, however, saw the Gorgons as adaptations of apes or gorillas, apparently basing their conclusions on the Elder Pliny's statement that the Gorgons were members of an excessively "hairy race."<sup>3</sup> Pettazzoni regarded the Gorgon as anthropomorphic and deriving from the Egyptian goddess Hathor; Frothingham and Marinatos related her through Artemis to the Great Mother goddess of the East.<sup>4</sup>

Although most agreed that the Gorgon and gorgoneion originated in fear, particularly of animals, Weizsäcker contended that the early, bearded gorgoneion was Phobos, Fear personified. His theory plainly did not hold when Blinkenberg applied it to Gorgons with female torsos who also wore bearded faces of the kind that Weizsäcker had indicated as Phobos.<sup>5</sup> Blinkenberg himself reverted to the limited view that believed the lion was the source.

It was the psychologist Wilhelm Wundt who first recognized the universal aspects of the gorgoneion and its true meaning: a mask deriving from an admixture of animalistic features and of a type common to most primitive cultures. In addition, H. J. Rose realized that the Gorgon arose from the subconscious fears of man and described it as a "pursuing nightmare phantom."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> K. Levezow "Ueber die Entwicklung des Gorgonen-Ideals in der Poesie und bildenden Kunst der Alten," *AbhBerl* 2,1 (1832).

<sup>2</sup> K. Gerojannis *JIntArNum* 9 (1906) 8ff. P. Wolters "Ein Apotropaion aus Baden" *BonnJbb* 118 (1909) 270ff. A. Cook *Zeus* (Cambridge, 1914-40) 3,1 p. 844. W. Ridgeway *JHS* 20 (1900) XLIV.

<sup>3</sup> A. Zell *Riesen der Tierwelt* (1910) p. 193. J. Facius *Miscell. zur Gesch.* p. 138, n. 16. Diodorus Siculus regarded the Gorgons as a tribe of Libyan women, drawing on the *Kyklos* of Skytobrachion. C. G. Heyne *De Font. Hist. Diodori* (1793) 1, p. LXVII. Pliny the Elder repeated Diodorus' version, adding the hairy description and telling how the hides of two Gorgons had been destroyed at Carthage by the Romans, *N.H.* 6,36. Athenaeus *Deipn.* 5,64. reports how Marius' soldiers in the Jugurthan campaign caught and skinned some Gorgons.

<sup>4</sup> R. Pettazzoni "Le origini della testa di Medusa" *BdA* ser. 2,1 (1921) 491-510. A. Frothingham "Medusa, Apollo and the Great Mother" *AJA* 15 (1911) 349-377, esp. p. 364. S. Marinatos "Τοργόρες Καὶ Τοργόρεια" *Ephem* (1927/8) 7-41.

<sup>5</sup> P. Weizsäcker s.v. "Phobos" in Roscher's *Lex* 3,2 (1909), pp. 2393ff. C. Blinkenberg "Gorgone et Lionne" *RA* ser. 5, 19 (1924) 267ff.

<sup>6</sup> W. Wundt *Völkerpsychologie* 3 (Leipzig, 1919) 212ff. H. Rose *Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London, 1928) pp. 29-30. S. Marinatos *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 4) p. 77. The ancient author who came closest to regarding the three sister Gorgons as Terrors was Fulgentius 1, 657 (xxi) (ed. R. Helm *Fabii Planciades Fulgenti Opera* 1, Leipzig, 1898). With his usual gift for concocting etymologies, Fulgentius interpreted them thus: Stheno as "asthenian infirmitatem," which weakens the mind; Euryale (the wide-leaper) as "lata profunditas," which scatters the mind; and Medusa as "quasi meidusam," which brings on mental blindness. Fulgentius ends on the moral note: "Hos ergo terrores Perseus adiuvante Minerva, id est virtus adiuvante sapientia, interfecit."

The second group of naturalistic rationalists, mainly of the 19th century, explained the Gorgon by other physical phenomena: Völcker believed she represented the terrors of the sea; Hermann, the ocean waves; Otto, volcanic eruptions; and Hug, the empty wastes of Libya. A large number, with Gaedechens as chief proponent, regarded the gorgoneion as a moon-symbol, and based their evidence on a remark of Clement of Alexandria that the Orphics called the moon "gorgoneion" because of the face one could see in it. As Farnell states, this description was suggested by the prominently rounded, but primarily late representations of the gorgoneion.<sup>7</sup>

The most authoritative interpretation was proposed by Roscher in his study, *Die Gorgonen und Verwandtes*, where he maintained that the Gorgons were Storm-clouds.<sup>8</sup> He based his conclusions on the Sanskrit stem of the name "Gorgon," "garḡ," which has connotations of noise that he interpreted as thunder. Whereas the etymologists Boisacq and Meyer agree that "Gorgon" is derived from that stem, at no point do their interpretations allow for storms.<sup>9</sup>

The Germanic and Romance languages also have numerous derivatives from this stem, and though all refer to the throat or to the guttural, gurgling noises produced in it, none connotes thunder any more than does the root itself.<sup>10</sup> Even the musical ramification of the stem denotes a faking kind of singing known as "gargling," which in turn closely parallels the idea Pindar sings of in the *12th Pythian*, the ode dedicated to a flute-player:<sup>11</sup>

"I beseech thee also to welcome himself, as champion over all Hellas in that art, which Pallas Athene invented when she wove into music the dismal death-dirge of the Gorgons bold,— the dirge, that Perseus heard, while it was poured forth, amid direful woe, from beneath those maidens' awful serpent-heads, what time he did to death the third of those sisters three . . ."

and further on:

"But when the maiden goddess had released her liege-man [Perseus] from these labours, she essayed to invent the many-voiced music of flutes, that so, by aid of music, she might

<sup>7</sup> For the best summary of these, s.v. "Gorgo" in Ersch und Grueber *Allgemeine Encyc. d. Wissens. Künste* 74 (1862) pp. 397-398; 401-403. The supporters of Gaedechens's thesis, pp. 397-398 included: Avellino, Hahn, Cavedoni, Panofka, Duc de Luynes, Stackelberg, Preller, Minervini, Schwenck, Beulé, Fr. Hermann. Clem. Al. *Stromata* 5,8,49 (ed. O. Staehlin 2, Leipzig, 1906, p. 360). H. Diels *Vorsokrat.*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin, 1951) 1, p. 18, Orpheus 1 (66) fr. 22. L. Farnell *Cults of the Greek States* (Oxford, 1896) p. 286, n. 5.

<sup>8</sup> W. Roscher "Die Gorgonen und Verwandtes" *Stud. z. griech. Myth. u. Kultur*. (Leipzig, 1879), chs. 2-4, and pp. 114ff.; s.v. "Gorgo" in his *Lex.* 1 (1884-90) pp. 1695-1727, which is based on his earlier study.

<sup>9</sup> É. Boisacq *Dict. étym. de la Lang. grec.*<sup>4</sup> (Heidelberg, 1950). Leo Meyer *Handb. d. Gr. Etym.* (Leipzig, 1901) 3, p. 45 describes it thus: ". . . er brüllt, tobt, von Thieren, Dämonen, übermüthig herausfordernden Menschen, vom Meere, Winde; abhi-garḡ, anbrüllen, wild herausfordernd anschreien." Die Bildung von Γοργῶ stimmt überein mit der von ἠχώ, alt 'φῆχῶ,' Schall, Wiederhall.' "ἠχώ" means not only "echo," a shadow of a sound, but a "ringing sound" as well. Two other etymologies have been suggested: R. Eilmann *AM* 58 (1933) 95, who derives it from "Cor-cyra." Also J. Jongkees *JEOL* 7 (1940) 429-432 from "Karkisa," or "Karia" in Asia Minor.

<sup>10</sup> Greek offers "γάργῳ," "to gargle." But it is Latin and the modern languages which emphasize with striking consistency the mouth and throat and the noises produced by these, especially of the crude and unspoken kind: Latin offers: "gargarisma, gargarizatio, gargarismatum, gargarizatus, gargarissare"; French: "gargouillis, gargouille, gargouillade, gorgotage (ill-dressed victuals that stick in the throat), gorge, gargouiller, gargariser, gargoter"; Spanish: "garganta, gargola, garguero, gargaño, gargantear, gargarar"; Italian: "gargaliata, gargatta, gargaliare, gargarizzare"; German: "Gurgel, Gurgelei, Gurgelwasser, gurgeln"; English: "gargoyle, gorge, gorgerin, gurgle" and among obscure words listed in the *Oxford English Dict.*: "gargarcon, gargarism, garget, gargil, gargon, gargolette." One must not forget the creature *Gargantua* who is described as the "large-mouthed voracious giant" in Rabelais. Shakespeare in *As You Like It*, 3,2,238 says: "You must borrow me Gargantua's mouth first."

<sup>11</sup> Pindar *P.* 12,6ff. Translated by J. Sandys *The Odes of Pindar* (London, 1937) p. 311 notes: "So called because it imitates the hisses of the many serpents entwined in the Gorgon's hair." O. Schröder *Hermes* 39 (1904) 315ff., suggests that, although this tune may refer to the serpent-headed Gorgons, it probably represented the variety of rhythm and content of the "tune of Athena," which was a counterpart of the famous Pythian tune. L. Farnell *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 7) 1, pp. 315-316.

imitate the cry exceeding shrill that burst from the ravening jaws of Euryale [one of the Gorgons]."

When musical imagination refined that guttural sound implicit in the ancient and modern derivatives of "garǵ," it was produced not by plucking or beating, but with breath blown into a narrow reed, a second throat attached to the real one. The noise was organic, sometimes animal-like, sometimes human, and even when instrumental it was still produced by breath in conjunction with a throat, in this case an inorganic one. To be sure, thunder rumbles and growls in a summer-storm, but it is not the sound consistently implied by "garǵ" and its derivatives.

Admittedly, such etymological interpretations of names too often lead the scholar astray, but in this particular instance the evidence seems large, and what is more important, consistent enough to lend credence. This interpretation gains further validity from the evidence of the pictorial representations which also bear out the idea of noise — noise without reference to storms. It is purely for this sonant reason that the Gorgon appears on monuments with a great distended mouth — to convey to the spectator the idea of a terrifying roar.

So far the evidence disposes of the thunder part of Roscher's interpretation, but not necessarily of the lightning aspect, which he believed was symbolized by the flashing eyes of the Gorgon.<sup>12</sup> However, the passages Roscher cites from Homer as evidence, do not verify his statements.<sup>13</sup> This is also true of all the Homeric

references to the Gorgon.<sup>14</sup> Nor do the Hesiodic poems substantiate this stormy interpretation.<sup>15</sup> There are, in fact, no such connotations in any of the works of even later antiquity.<sup>16</sup>

Roscher's other evidence for the origin of the Gorgons in Storm-clouds can also be refuted. It does not signify, for example, that the Gorgons and Storm-clouds were kin-folk simply because legend had them cohabiting the "westernmost regions of the sea."<sup>17</sup> In addition, the Gorgons were adorned with snakes not because of their relationship to Athena as storm-goddess,

<sup>14</sup> *Il.* 5, 738 ff. *Od.* 11, 634ff.

<sup>15</sup> *Shield of Herakles* 216ff.

<sup>16</sup> On checking over some 15 epithets applied to the Gorgon, all that could be gleaned from ancient descriptions, not one implies storm phenomena, etymologically or otherwise. Roscher himself reveals, or so it would seem, how he was led astray in designating the Gorgons as "Gewitterwolken," when he says (*op. cit.*, *supra* n. 8 *Stud. z. gr. Myth.* p. 14, 63ff.; *Lex.* 1,2 p. 1699): "Wie das deutsche Wort 'Blitz' nach Grimm ursprünglich einen feurigen Blick (vgl. auch unser 'Silberblick') bezeichnet so fassten auch die Griechen den Blitz vielfach als den leuchtenden Blick entweder der über Blitz und Donner gebietenden Götter Zeus und Athene oder eines entsetzlichen Ungeheuers auf. Aus keinem anderen Grunde wurden die schrecklichen Augen und der furchtbare Blick der Gorgo (*Il.* Θ, 349; Δ, 36) schon von Homer besonders hervorgehoben." As the etymologists Kluge and Goetze and also Grimm (whom Roscher cites) point out, the "Blitz," "lightning," and "Blick," "look" of the *German* had the same stem, so that "Blitz" could with perfect reason be regarded literally as a "flashing look" (Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm *Deutsches Wörterbuch* Leipzig, 1860. Fr. Kluge und Alfred Goetze *Etym. Wörterbuch d. deutschen Sprach* Berlin, 1951). But the same cognate relationship simply does not hold for the Greek "ἀστραπή," "lightning," and for whichever of the three Greek words, "ὄψις," "δέργμα," "βλέμμα," Roscher may have had in mind for "look" but did not specify (*op. cit.* n. 8 *Stud. z. gr. Myth.* p. 13, ch. 1; *Lex.* 1,2 p. 1699). In any case, none of these three Greek words is derived from any root that denotes fire, flashing or lightning. Hence, any analogy between the Greek and German is invalid. Roscher must have been so imaginatively impressed by the single source of origin in German for the two words "Blitz" and "Blick" that he carried the image over into the Greek and erroneously characterized the Gorgon with these aspects of thunder and lightning.

<sup>17</sup> Hesiod *Theog.* 270ff. H. Evelyn-White *Homeric* (New York, 1914) Cypria, fr. 21. p. 505. In Aischylos *Prometheus* 790ff., the Gorgons live in the eastern lands, in the plains of Cisthene.

<sup>12</sup> W. Roscher *Stud. z. Gr. Myth. op. cit.* (*supra* n. 8) pp. 13ff., 46ff., 71ff.

<sup>13</sup> W. Roscher *Stud. z. gr. Myth. op. cit.* (*supra* n. 8) pp. 73ff. *Il.* 8, 348: "Γοργούς ὄμματ' ἔχων ἥδ' ἐβροτολοιοῦ Ἀρης." and *Il.* 11, 36ff., in the description of the shield of Agamemnon: "τῇ δ' ἐπὶ μὲν Γοργῶ βλοσυρῶπις ἐστεφάνωτο δεινὸν δερκομένη, περὶ δὲ Δεῖμός τε Φόβος τε." "βλοσυρῶπις" simply denotes a "bristling look," or, if "ὄψ" is interpreted as "face," it can also mean a "hairy appearance," descriptive of the Gorgon's beard. "Δέρκομαι" means "to look, have sight" and expresses the eyes' flash or gleam; its Sanskrit root "darś," "to see," refers not merely to sight but to sharp sight. Sharp eyes may have a flashing brilliance, but that quality has no physical connection with lightning.

but because all their relatives (as well as the Greek theogony) swarm with them.<sup>18</sup> Nor are the black garments, which Roscher claims the Gorgons wore (although his reference is really to the Eumenides), a valid indication of Storm-clouds.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Roscher finds analogies in the fact that the Gorgons number three, as do the Storm-clouds, according to his argument. One scarcely need go into the common recurrence of such triads in every folk culture to realize how meaningless is his point.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Roscher does seem to have one valid bit of evidence when, in the *Theogony*, Hesiod speaks of the Gorgon's offspring, the winged horse Pegasus, and how ". . . he dwells in the house of Zeus and brings to wise Zeus the thunder and lightning."<sup>21</sup> But these stormy phenomena already belong to Zeus the god of the heavens, and not to Pegasus who merely shepherds them for his master; even less do they belong to his monstrous mother.

It is clear that some terrible noise was the originating force behind the Gorgon: a guttural, animal-like howl that issued with a great

wind from the throat and required a hugely distended mouth, while the tongue, powerless to give coherence, hung down to the jaw. So dominant was the idea of the noise and the face that, at first, no one gave thought to a body with normal arms and legs. But how did this menacing mask first arise and what was the meaning of its horrible outcry?

In contriving this mask the Greeks did what primitive peoples normally do in making such frightful masks: they gave expression to their fears, and by the act of expressing, conquered these fears, which in this case were specifically of beasts of prey. Thus the gorgoneion was simply an expression of the terror the lonely wanderer felt in the beast-haunted night, and though solely of imaginative origin, the head was given this generalized animal-like form. But once such a mask was in the grip of men's hands, by the very process of being fashioned into a mask, this terror of lonely, preying places began to abate. Thus the gorgoneion, the mask, was a symbol of human aggression, and as such the first step in overcoming the original, man-created fear. It is also important to remember that the expression of it took the form not only of a flat drawing, but of a mask, a third-dimensional object that was meant to be worn. For through the depersonalization that is permitted by the wearing of such a protome, man can vicariously experience the animality which first frightened him. Thus he understands, and in understanding he learns how to control. But the experience has to be felt with more than naturalistic vividness, an effect which the realistic reproduction of a familiar animal or form can not produce. So it is, that even when a specific animal is adapted to a mask, there must be present distortion, roaring noise, exaggeration and malformation usually through multiplicity of color and stark, horrifying composite forms, all incorporated in a grotesque enlargement of the fear that must be worked off.<sup>22</sup> In the *Iliad* therefore, where only the first stage of the Gorgon, as gorgoneion, appears, the head has Terror and Rout as its companion-pieces

<sup>18</sup> W. Roscher *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 8) *Lex.* 1,2 p. 1699; *Stud. z. gr. Myth.* p. 14. Keto bore to Phorkys the Gorgons with their snaky locks and girdles; she bore the great reptile which guarded the Garden of the Hesperides; and the monster Echidna, half nymph and half snake, who in turn bore the Chimaera who was one-third snake.

<sup>19</sup> W. Roscher *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 8) *Lex.* 1,2 pp. 1696, 1700; *Stud. z. gr. Myth.* pp. 15, 88ff., 97ff. Aischylos *Choephoroi* 1048ff. In not a single monument is the Medusa rendered in black. The ones of the Corcyraean pediments, for example, wear the bright colors of archaic taste. G. Rodenwaldt *Die Bildwerke des Artemistempels von Korkyra* (Berlin, 1939) 2, pp. 23-42. In one vase painting representing a scene from the *Phorkides* of Aischylos the Medusa is not dressed in black, though curiously enough, the other Gorgons and Perseus are. L. Séchan *Études sur la tragédie grecque dans ses rapports avec la céramique* (Paris, 1926) fig. 35. A. Dumont in *Mons. Grecs* 1 (1878) pl. 2, pp. 15ff.

<sup>20</sup> W. Roscher *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 8) *Lex.* 1,2 p. 1700; *Stud. z. gr. Myth.* pp. 15, 105ff. E. Loewy "Ursprünge der bildenden Kunst" *Akad. der Wissens. in Wien* (1930) 8ff., discusses this repetitive element in Greek art and deduces that it was used simply for accumulative effect since three Gorgons would be thrice as fearful as one.

<sup>21</sup> W. Roscher *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 8) *Stud. z. gr. Myth.* pp. 16, 114-120; *Lex.* 1,2 p. 1701. Hesiod *Th.* 285ff.

<sup>22</sup> I am indebted to Meyer Schapiro for this interpretation of masks made during a lecture. E. Loewy *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 20) pp. 4ff.

on the aegis of Athena and the shield of Agamemnon. When used on such defensive armor the gorgoneion was plainly meant as apotropaism, a horror to avert horror.<sup>23</sup>

Such, in all probability, was also the origin of other Greek mask-types that have survived since Cretan and later times, both as actual protomes or simply as decorations on all kinds of objects.<sup>24</sup> Frequently these early ones have been enthusiastically identified as gorgoneia, although on careful examination they differ markedly from each other and from the traditional head of the Gorgon as it appears, for example, on the Corcyraean pediment or on the countless little gorgoneia of Attic and Corinthian art. Yet, it is possible that some of these early heads were intended as gorgoneia.<sup>25</sup> Furtwängler suggests a logical explanation to the question of these borderline types, when he points out that although Homer mentions four gorgoneia, he never actually describes these.<sup>26</sup> This would imply, therefore, that even in his time the gorgoneion was only a generalized notion, the features of which did not as yet have a specific and commonly recognizable formulation. Normally then, with only a general idea

in mind, each artist formed what to him was a fearful, animal-like face, monstrous and usually open-mouthed. But there are so many variations possible on this general concept that it took a few centuries before the traditional image was developed. This formulation does not appear until very early in the 7th century B.C. when, suddenly, example after example can be shown of a single image so individual that even though some examples may have beards or horns or fangs and others do not, they are all unmistakably gorgoneia.

Of the earliest incontestable gorgoneia on monuments, four are Protocorinthian (pl. 35, fig. 1);<sup>27</sup> the fifth is attached to the body of a female centaur adorning a Boeotian pithos (pl. 35, fig. 2);<sup>28</sup> and the last head, on a Rhodian plate, decks a figure of Artemis draped and posed as Potnia Theron, Mistress of Beasts (pl. 35, fig. 3).<sup>29</sup> Deducing from these rare and unusual figures, we are led to believe that the Gorgon, although familiar enough to the poets, did not as yet have a distinctive, visualized form so that the early artists had to improvise

<sup>23</sup> *Op. cit.* (*supra* n. 13).

<sup>24</sup> P. Kabbadias *Fouilles de Lykosoura* (Athens, 1893) pl. 4. A. Furtwängler *Antike Gemmen* (Leipzig, 1900) 1, pl. 2 #30-35. R. Bosanquet *BSA* 12 (1905/6) 338ff., fig. 5-9. R. Dawkins *BSA* 13 (1906/7) 105. G. Dickins *BSA* 13 (1906/7) 372ff., pl. 14. M. Bieber *Griechische Kleidung* (Berlin, 1928) p. 68, pl. 34, 1-2. A. Wace *AJA* 38 (1934) 107ff., pl. 10. A. Evans *Palace of Minos* (London, 1935) 4,2 p. 393, figs. 329, 363-6. M. Bieber *Greek and Roman Theater* (London, 1939) pp. 33-35, figs. 36-8; s.v. "Maske" *RE* 14,2 pp. 2070ff. M. Nilsson *Minoan-Mycenaean Religion*<sup>2</sup> (Lund, 1950) pp. 376ff. Athenaeus *Deipn.* 10, 425c. Ar. *Lys.* 645 and scholia.

<sup>25</sup> For example: 8th century scrawl on a warrior's shield in a Melian vase painting, A. Conze *Melische Tongefässe* (Leipzig, 1862) pl. 3. H. Besig *Gorgo und Gorgoneion* (Berlin, 1937) p. 17 regards a head from Tiryns as earliest, and next, one on a Theban bronze, A little more acceptable as a gorgoneion is the face on an ivory seal from Sparta, R. Dawkins *BSA* 13 (1906/7) 91ff., fig. 25c. A. Furtwängler regards as the earliest monetary representation of a gorgoneion one on a Euboic stater, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 24) p. 170. P. Gardner *Types* (Cambridge, 1883) pl. 4,5. B. Head *Br. Mus. Guide to Principal Coins of Ancients*<sup>3</sup> (London, 1889) pl. 1,4 p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Il.* and *Od.* references *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 13, 14).

<sup>27</sup> The four Protocorinthian gorgoneia: On a vase in the shape of a lion protome, P. Orsi *NS* (1893) 470ff. H. Friis Johansen *Les Vases sicyoniens* (Paris, 1923) pp. 157, 190 pl. 41,5. H. Payne *Necrocorinthia* (Oxford, 1931) pp. 80ff., fig. 23a. See pl. 35, fig. 1a. On the Macmillan aryballos the gorgoneion was a handle ornament, Cecil Smith *JHS* 10 (1890) pl. 1,2 pp. 167ff. H. F. Johansen pl. 31, 1c. H. Payne p. 81, fig. 23b. See pl. 35, fig. 1b. Gorgoneion as a shield device on the Chigi oinochoe, *AntDenk* 2 (1908) pl. 44. H. F. Johansen pl. 39, 1b; *Ausonia* 8 (1913) 104ff., pl. 6,7. H. Payne p. 80, fig. 23c. See pl. 35, fig. 1c. Aryballos from Gela, H. F. Johansen pl. 34,2.

<sup>28</sup> The Boeotian pithos Gorgon, Louvre *CA* 795. A. De Ridder *BCH* 22 (1898) 439ff., 497ff., pls. 4-5. R. Hampe *Frühe griechische Sagenbilder* (Athens, 1936) pp. 56-73, pls. 36, 38, R. I. L. Malten *JDAI* 29 (1914) 182ff., fig. 3. F. Courby *Les Vases grecs à reliefs* (Paris, 1922) pl. 3,2, fig. 16c. B. Filow *Die archaische Nekropole von Trebenische* (Berlin, 1927) fig. 39. E. Buschor *AJA* 38 (1934) 130. H. Besig *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 25) p. 75. J. Woodward *Perseus* (Cambridge, 1937) pp. 31-32, fig. 3a,b. F. Grace *Archaic Sculptures in Boeotia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1939) pp. 16ff.

<sup>29</sup> The Rhodian Gorgon-Artemis, *JHS* 6 (1885) 277-278, pl. 49. G. Radet "Cybèbe" *Bibl. d. Univ. Midi* (1909) fasc. 13, p. 45, fig. 59. H. Frothingham *AJA* 15 (1911) 369, fig. 8. E. Buschor *Greek Vase Paintings* (London, 1921) pl. 30, fig. 59. K. Gerojannis *Ephem* (1927/8) 154, fig. 5.

a bodily appearance and costume for her out of attributes temporarily borrowed from the local divinities with whom she was associated.

Thus, for example, the Boeotians in the early 7th century B.C. were unique in regarding the Gorgon not only as a centaur-maiden, but as attractive, with dainty breasts and hands and an almost human face. In fact she is so startlingly untraditional that it is mainly by the Perseus depicted in the act of beheading her that she can be identified with certainty. But her curious equine form and her attractions can be explained by the fact that her consort was Poseidon, the chief deity of Boeotia, who was worshipped locally as Hippios, God of Horses, rather than as God of the Sea.<sup>30</sup> For his greater pleasure, the local Gorgon was given this centaur guise, and out of their union was born the youth Chrysaor and the winged horse Pegasus.<sup>31</sup> It is easy to understand how Hippios was given the Gorgon for his lover: in his lusty, equine aspect this god, who was himself the father of monsters, mated readily with her wild, animal nature. Indeed, only an aggressive force, one more dominant than hers, could master the Gorgon. And in the meadows, amidst the shining flowers of spring, even as Hesiod describes their union, the wildest of fears subsides and becomes tractable.<sup>32</sup>

It is also probable that from this temporary union with Poseidon the Gorgon received the epithet of "Medusa," "Guardian, Goddess," which occurs first in Hesiod, the poet of Boeotia. Poseidon's name signifies "Lord, Master," but her new title, as Gruppe suggests, most likely came from one of his other titles, "Eury-medon," "the wide-ruling one," of which "Medusa" is the shortened, feminine form.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> L. Farnell *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 7) 4, pp. 18ff.

<sup>31</sup> L. Malten *JDAI* 29 (1914) 184. Another such equine union occurred between Poseidon and the Thelpusan Demeter of Arcadia, and their offspring was the horse Areion. Paus. 7,25,4ff.; 8,37,9; 8,42,4 and Frazer's commentary on this.

<sup>32</sup> Hesiod *Th.* 278ff.

<sup>33</sup> O. Gruppe *Griechische Mythologie* in I. Mueller *Handbuch d. Altertumswissen.* (1906) 2, p. 1141. E. Meyer *Griechische Etymologie* 4, 326. Cornutus *De Natura Deorum* 22. A. Fick-Bechtel *Gr. Personnamen*<sup>2</sup> (Göttingen, 1894) p. 458. K. Gerojannis believed that

At most, this appellation was a courtesy, a gracious reminder of the favors once bestowed by a god. There does not seem to be any evidence, certainly not in Boeotia, that the Gorgon was ever a "ruler" in her own right, or a goddess, not even when she was mated with Poseidon. Yet, though never more than a demon, she enjoyed her days of vigorous belief if not of formal worship. "Medusa," therefore, was less a proper designation than a cautious euphemism for this monster, this Fear that still persisted.

If the gorgoneion mask, as the tangible configuration, represented the first step in the overcoming of this Fear, then, as Hesiod and his followers and the Boeotian artist testify, the second stage was her decapitation by Perseus, who beheaded the beast and ran for his life. But at the same time, the Boeotians also set the god Poseidon to cope with her, and as a god he easily became the master of her wild nature. Both the mating by the god and the beheading by the demi-god were parallel expressions of attempts to divert her demonic power and horror.

So intense was belief in the Gorgon in the early 7th century that she went beyond the mere status of consort and became still further identified with deity. On the aforementioned Rhodian plate, garbed as Potnia Theron the monster wears a long, black, girdled chiton that is slit to expose the left, advanced leg; from her shoulders extends a double pair of long, curving wings; the face, unmistakably gorgoneion, is square, strongly bearded, and has a protruding tongue; and in her hands she holds a pair of long-necked birds.<sup>34</sup> If one removes only the unmistakably Gorgon face, what remains belongs normally to Artemis in her role of Mistress of Beasts. Now it is of fundamental importance to realize that such external resemblance can only arise out of some internal affinity. Artemis, the popular goddess of Greek rustic worship, was wild nature personified and deified, as her titles, Potnia Theron, and, Agrotera, readily confirm. Homer also referred

the epithet was a mere euphemism for the Gorgon, *Ephem* (1927/8) 144.

<sup>34</sup> Rhodian plate Gorgon, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 29).

to her as "Keladeine," "the noisy, echoing one." In older belief she was the mistress, not the huntress, but the protector of wild beasts, especially of the very young and those in travail.<sup>35</sup> Thus it was a simple matter for the Gorgon and her animality to become identified with the Mistress of Animals. Once the internal affinity was established, the detached and unincorporated gorgoneion could be tacked on to the external form of Artemis.<sup>36</sup>

But it was not the original concept of the Gorgon, as Fear of Animals, that was equated with Artemis; it was the Gorgon in her second and more important, *apotropaic* phase, as an animal fear that has been overcome and diverted to fend off other fears. In that aspect she functioned as benevolently as did the goddess herself in protecting the people. The union, moreover, was reciprocal for, while the Gorgon borrowed shelter and honors, as at the Temple of Artemis at Corcyra, the goddess appropriated the popular enthusiasm the monster engendered.

The extant examples representing the Gorgon-Artemis, though few, appear on monuments from widely scattered places, indicative of the range of this belief: from Rhodes (but with possible manufacture at Miletos), from Sparta and Euboea in Greece itself, from the island of Corcyra and, finally, Orvieto in Italy as the westernmost locality.<sup>37</sup> By comparison, the unique centaur-Gorgon of Boeotia seems like a local idiosyncrasy.

It was, in fact, in the entourage of Artemis at Corcyra in the early 6th century that the Gorgon attained her apogee. In the very center of both pediments of the goddess's temple stood a colossal Medusa, the chief ornament of the edifice (pl. 35, fig. 4).<sup>38</sup> In this period, although the supremacy of the Olympians was acknowledged by the very fact that the temples were erected in their names, the gable decorations betrayed the other popular beliefs, ones that were very probably more important in the minds of the inhabitants of each locality.<sup>39</sup> For example, on the west pediment of this temple of Artemis three distinctly different themes were represented which to us have no logical schematic unity but which symbolized the triad of beliefs that absorbed the Greeks of that period: the literary interest, represented by the Homeric figure of Priam slain by Neoptolemos; the Olympian religion, represented by a tiny Zeus slaying a giant; and superstitious belief, in the Gorgon and flanking animals. From the outstanding size and station of the Gorgon it is obvious that the demonic element predominated. This is evidenced further by the fact that she is not shown at the mercy of the hero, who, indeed, is not even included. Moreover, her great head still sits squarely on her shoulders even though she holds the children that presumably sprang from her severed neck.

Although the gorgoneion, rather than the Gorgon, was the original element in the myth,

<sup>35</sup> *Il.* 21,470; 16,183. Xen. *H.G.* 4,2,20. Paus. 1,19,6; 1,41,3; 5,15,8; 7,26,3; 8,32,4. As goddess of wild nature: O. Kern *Die Rel. d. Griechen* (Berlin 1926) 1, pp. 101, 105, 111. W. Otto *Die Götter Griechenlands*<sup>2</sup> (Frankfurt, 1934) 102ff. M. Nilsson *Min.-Myc. Rel.*<sup>2</sup> (Lund, 1950) p. 303. L. Farnell *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 7) 2, pp. 427ff.

<sup>36</sup> Frothingham, who made a comparison between the Gorgon and Artemis on external grounds, did not explain their inner relationships. To him the Gorgon was the sun-disk, "Medusa, Apollo and the Great Mother" *AJA* 15 (1911) 349ff. But he cites only one example of the Gorgon as such, from a vase of Corinto in the *Blacas Coll.* fig. 10. K. Levezow *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 1) pl. 2,21. It is a circular head with snakes ringing it, which he regards as a "nimbus."

<sup>37</sup> For Rhodian Gorgon-Artemis example, *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 29). Spartan examples: R. Dawkins *BSA* 13 (1906/7) 44, 77, 83, fig. 19. This has been restored with wings;

possibly she had a double pair. Bosanquet *BSA* 12 (1905/6) 340, pl. 11a. Euboean example: E. Niki *RA* ser. 6,1 (1933) 147, fig. 1a. Orvieto offers a unique example of a male Gorgon of Etruscan make: G. Körte *AZ* 35 (1877) 110ff., pl. 11. A photograph of the original, obtained through the kindness of Enrico Paribeni, verifies the accuracy of Körte's drawing. For Corcyraean example: *op. cit.* (n. 38).

<sup>38</sup> G. Rodenwaldt *Korkyra* (Berlin, 1939) 2, pls. 1-9, figs. 3-29; *Die altdorische Bildwerke in Korfu* (Berlin, 1938) pl. 10-15. It is the west gable that is largely extant, but enough fragments remain of the east gable to make possible the identification of the Gorgon: *Korkyra* 2, pp. 108ff., figs. 94-97.

<sup>39</sup> It was not before the middle of the 6th century B.C. that the themes of the pedimental decorations were concerned mainly with divine personages, as a survey of even the small poros temples built in Athens in the first half of the 6th century will prove.



the Greeks, not realizing that fact, soon after its appearance reasoned that it must have belonged to a figure which had been decapitated. We have seen their efforts to "restore" her bodily appearance, thus creating the Gorgon. They then found it necessary to devise some slayer responsible for the decapitation. At this point the question arises as to the role of Perseus: was this great hero originally a mere afterthought, the rationalization of an event that, even mythically speaking, never took place?

Sometimes a name points like a vane in the direction of origin, as was true for example in the Gorgon's case. Perseus' name, too, reveals his origins with the simplest candour. Boisacq derives it from the aorist form of the verb "πέρθειν," which is given by Liddell and Scott as: "1. to waste, ravage, sack. 2. of persons, to destroy, slay." He derived the verb from the Sanskrit "bardh-aka-h," "to cut, trim, prune, shave."<sup>40</sup> Buttman and Pott agreed that this verb was the source, but Wilamowitz opposed it, claiming that Perseus "destroyed" nothing. Bieler, however, made out the hero as the "Destroyer of Cities," as well as the decapitator of the Gorgon.<sup>41</sup> Apparently these two regarded only the first aspect of the verb and ignored the second, "to slay," which was used in connection with persons. Furthermore, the Sanskrit stem, which denotes a destruction by cutting, describes perfectly the central action of the myth.

Perseus, as the "Cutter," is depicted in the very act of cutting off the head of the Gorgon on the two earliest known representations of him, on the aforementioned Boeotian pithos, and on an Attic bronze fragment, both of the early 7th century. Later representations very rarely depicted him as actually beheading her, but more commonly, as fleeing after having done so. It is curious that on the Attic fragment Perseus decapitates her with a sickle while

at the same time he wears a sword. This may simply indicate the hero's emergence from peasant belief; although in Athens he was apparently rising to the status of one important enough to own a sword, normally he was still more at home with the lowly sickle.<sup>42</sup>

Some scholars, finding no solution in etymology,<sup>43</sup> have attempted to see the Perseus-Gorgon

<sup>42</sup> Boeotian pithos: *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 28). The Attic bronze fragment: R. Hampe "Korfugiebel und frühe Perseusbilder" *AM* 60/61 (1935/6) 286-287, pl. 98. *JHS* 13 (1892) 262. W. H. Ward *Seal Cylinders of Western Asia* (Washington, 1910) p. 163, claims that the sickle and scimitar of similar shape were originally a snake motif that was changed or evolved into a weapon. He states that the conception of a serpent-weapon is also indicated by the Babylonian caduceus. In Perseus' case it hardly seems necessary to look for elaborate influences, either oriental or from fertility cults, to explain his use of the sickle. It was a commonplace object, a tool and weapon that hung on the wall of every house of the period.

<sup>43</sup> For other etymological interpretations of the name "Perseus," both ancient and modern: The ancients believed that Perseus had some connections with Persia, but since his own name did not mean specifically "the Persian," they invented a son for him, "Perses," whose name was interpreted as such. This was patently forced since the name appears in Greek literature (as Hesiod's brother, for example) before the historical rise of the Persians. But the rapid rise of this empire, within a single generation, brought speculations that involved this nation with Greek legend so that Skylax of Caryanda, Aischylos, Hellanikos and Herodotos connected Perseus with Persia. A. Pers. 79. K. Tümpel *Jahrb. f. class. Philol.* suppl. 16 (1888) p. 155, believed that Skylax of Caryanda was the first to identify Perseus with the Persians. Hellanikos: *FHG* 1, p. 67 fr. 159, 160. *FGHst* 1,4 fr. 59, 60, and commentary. St. Byz. s.v. 'Αρτάλη and Χαλδαίοι. K. Mueller regards Hellanikos as the source for this idea, *FHG* 3, p. 365 fr. 13. *FGHst* 2, p. 90, fr. 6. Hdt. 7.61. Apollod. *Bibliotheca* 2.4.5. Eust. *Schol. Dionys. Perig.* 1056. O. Gruppe *Gr. Myth.* (Munich, 1897-1906) 1, 387, l. J. Marquart *Philologus* 55 (1896) p. 237. E. Wüst s.v. "Perses" *RE*. G. Gray *CAH* 4, pp. 2-3. A. Krappe *REG* 43 (1930) p. 156. Two or three modern scholars have actually attempted to derive the name "Perseus" from Eastern sources. Robert Brown believed it came from the Phoenician "Barsav," *Semitic Influence in Hellenic Mythology* (London, 1898) p. 141, and that "Barsav" was a variant of "Uscho" (Greek "Ousoos"), who was the hunter-god of Phoenician mythology. A. Sayce *JHS* 45 (1925) 162 derived the name from "Attarsiyas" which appears on the Boghaz-Köi inscriptions of ca. 1250 B.C. This Attar-

<sup>40</sup> É. Boisacq *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 9) p. 771.

<sup>41</sup> P. Buttman *Mythologus* (1829) 2, pp. 191-192. Pott *Kirchliche Zeitung* (1860) 179. U. Wilamowitz *Pin-daros* (Berlin, 1922) p. 148, l. L. Bieler *WS* 46 (1931) 123, n. 19. A. Fick-Bechtel *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 33) pp. 431, 461. On Perseus as "Destroyer of Cities," this idea seems to stem from Aischylos' description of the Persian troops as "περσέεπολις στρατός" in *Pers.* 65ff. *Etyim. Mag.* 665, 46.

myth as deriving from those of Asia Minor. Clark Hopkins, for example, saw a parallel to Perseus and the Gorgon in the Babylonian Gilgamesh and Humbaba.<sup>44</sup> The hero, Gilgamesh, has been represented beheading the monster, Humbaba, with a sickle-sword as he looks away. The demon, wearing a short garment like the Gorgon's, appears with head and torso in frontal pose and legs in profile. Hopkins, furthermore, claimed that "Humbaba" meant a "voice like a tempest," and that its mouth (if not its eyes as in the Gorgon's case) caused death. Langdon, however, derived the name from an animal's and likened the head of the creature to a bull's.<sup>45</sup> Frequently also, Humbaba was represented as a grimacing, apotropaic mask. So far the resemblances are striking, but Humbaba's appearance had one diacritical feature and function not shared by the Gorgon: its face was rendered by a single-line drawing which is regarded as an attempt to imitate the appearance of sheep-entrails that were used in divination. This feature is distinguishable on examples at least as far back as the period of Sargon of Akkad in the 24th century (pl. 36, fig. 5).<sup>46</sup> The face of Humbaba, like the sheep-entrails, was

used for purposes of divination, indicating, therefore, another serious difference in interpretation, and consequently in origin between Humbaba and the Gorgon. In addition, Hopkins has remarked that in decapitation scenes on Eastern representations of the kind just described, it is by no means certain that Gilgamesh and Humbaba are specifically the figures represented. In fact, Opfer, in his study on the death of Humbaba has identified only one illustration, and that of the third millennium, as positively depicting Gilgamesh and Humbaba. Hopkins and Porada also offer only one other example, of the Neo-Assyrian period, 9th to 7th centuries B.C. (pl. 36, fig. 6).<sup>47</sup> If, then, representations of this Gilgamesh-Humbaba myth were so rare locally, how could a sufficient quantity of them have reached the Greeks and inspired them to absorb this myth into their own mythology? However, even though scenes of Gilgamesh and Humbaba were rare in Eastern art, other heroes and monsters were quite frequently rendered in attitudes similar to those of that epic pair. It must have been these illustrations that the Greeks knew. It was in the fused art of the Hittites, Babylonians and Assyrians that this particular formalized pose of aggression was developed and it was apparently this *artistic formulation* which the Greeks borrowed rather than the theme itself.<sup>48</sup>

So far, only the points of external resemblance have been considered, but an investigation of the fundamental conceptions behind the Eastern and the Greek myths makes it clear that the latter did not derive from the former. Briefly: it was Humbaba's function to guard

siyas was a king of the "Akhkhiyawa" whom E. Forrer *OLZ* 27,3 (1924) 113ff., identified as the Achaeans. Forrer believed that Atreus was meant by this king, not Perseus. If one inquires into the deeds of either Barsav or Attarsiyas it is immediately obvious that neither of these had any possible connection with the events of the Perseus myth. See also: Catterall s.v. "Perseus" *RE* 19,1 p. 987. Stanley Cook, *The Religion of Ancient Palestine* (London, 1930) pp. 109-115, suggests that Perseus may be identified with Reseph, a Semitic god who was also worshipped in Egypt as a fighting god, and in Syria. He also had a temple in Carthage, *CIS* 1, 251. C. Clermont-Ganneau *RA* ser. 2, 32 (1876) 372ff.

<sup>44</sup> C. Hopkins "Assyrian Elements in the Perseus-Gorgon Story" *AJA* 38 (1934) 341ff.

<sup>45</sup> S. Langdon *Semitic Mythology in the Myth of All Races* 5 (Boston, 1931), p. 254. The Gilgamesh Epic stresses Humbaba's cry which has been variously translated as "tempest, hurricane, or flood," all of which might easily imply a "roar." M. Jastrow and A. Clay *An Old Babylonian Version of the Gilgamesh Epic* (New Haven, 1920) p. 60. F. Thureau-Dangin *RAssyr.* 22 (1925) 23ff. É. Dhorme *Choix de textes religieux Assyro-Babyloniens* (Paris, 1907) p. 229, col. V.1.

<sup>46</sup> C. Hopkins *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 44) p. 348, fig. 1. S. Smith "The Face of Humbaba" *JRAS* 26 (1926) 440-442, pl. 5.

S. Langdon *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 45) 5, p. 254 figs. 79-80. *Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology* 11 (1924) 107ff., pl. 13, on the entrail face of Humbaba.

<sup>47</sup> D. Opfer "Der Tod des Humbaba" *AOF* 5 (1928) 207ff. C. Hopkins *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 44) p. 352 fig. 4. E. Porada *Corpus of Anc. Near East. Seals* (New York, 1948) pp. 82ff., fig. 686, see also pp. 90ff., figs. 747ff., figs. 592-3, 595-7, 600, 607-8, 815ff. Thureau-Dangin *London Illustrated News* 166, Feb. 1925, p. 246.

<sup>48</sup> On the question of Eastern influence in archaic Greek art, see: H. Frankfort "Achaemenian Sculpture" *AJA* 50 (1946) 6ff. G. Richter "Greeks in Persia" *AJA* 50 (1946) 15ff.

the cedars of Lebanon, while later he was made a demon of the underworld. Gilgamesh, an historical king of the first dynasty of Erech, became an omniscient deity who was concerned with the betterment of his people. For them he tamed Enkidu, the representative of savagery; and he also sought to obtain the plant of eternal life.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Gilgamesh suffered, and in this partook more of the nature of Prometheus than of Perseus. As the great hero, his story formed the national epic of the Sumerians and Babylonians; the Hittites also gave him much honor.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, Perseus' entire role was different. He never became a deity, nor even the moral and ethical leader of his people. Other heroes certainly surpassed him in popularity, and were even deified, like Herakles. Moreover, the philosophical beliefs which eventually gathered around the legend of Gilgamesh did not do so in Perseus' case, even in his later development in classical tragedy.

There is no reason to believe, therefore, that the Perseus myth did not originate in Greece. But where and when did it first appear? Kretschmer, in broaching the problem, has pointed out that the names of heroes which end in *-eus*, belonged to an older series, while on the other hand, the sons of these heroes generally were given compound names, as for example, Achilles and his son Neoptolemos.<sup>51</sup> Nilsson, taking over Kretschmer's statement, then argued that since names such as Neoptolemos were current in Homer, the names of the "older" series must correspondingly date from pre-Homeric times. He summarized his arguments in his *Mycenaean Origin of Greek Religion*. In the case of Perseus, he based these on an inscription from Mycenae which speaks of certain officials of Perseus' cult. The inscription is dated about 500 B.C. Kühnert agreed with Nilsson that this was testimony of Perseus' very ancient connec-

tions with Mycenae.<sup>52</sup> Although there is no doubt that he was the patron hero of Mycenae, Perseus also had a cult at Athens and at Seriphos, cults that were established in archaic and even later times.<sup>53</sup> What proof do we have, therefore, that the cult at Mycenae was so much earlier than these, or much earlier than the date of the local late archaic inscription?

Although we can not determine with any certainty that the myth actually arose in Mycenaean times, there is no question but that a number of the incidents had Mycenae and Argos as their locale. The Gorgon, for example, was associated with such sites as Mycenae, Mycale, Mycalessos.<sup>54</sup> Mycenae and Argos were centers of the later elements of the myth in particular, being regarded as the burial places of the hero, of the Gorgon-head, and of Gorgophone, Perseus' daughter, obviously because the elaborate burial chambers of the Mycenaeans suggested as much to the ancients.<sup>55</sup> It was also just such a beehive tomb that was the inspiration for the "underground bronze chamber" in which Danae, the mother of the hero, was imprisoned by her father Akrisios, to be kept from the sight of men.<sup>56</sup> According to the legend, however, Akrisios, fated to die at the hands of Danae's son, did not reckon with Zeus who, in the form of a shower of gold, slipped easily through a chink in the roof and on to her lap. This rare form of the god's appearance has been interpreted by Robert and Otto as

<sup>49</sup> S. Langdon *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 45) pp. 234-249, on the Gilgamesh epic.

<sup>50</sup> The Assyrians also took over the Gilgamesh Epic when they came to power. J. Friedrich *ZAssyr.* 39 (1929/30) 1ff. P. Jensen *Das Gilgamesh-Epos in der Weltliteratur* 2 vols. (1906-28). S. N. Kramer "The Epic of Gilgamesh and its Sumerian Sources" *JAOS* 64 (1944) 7ff.

<sup>51</sup> P. Kretschmer *Glotta* 4 (1913) pp. 305ff.

<sup>52</sup> M. Nilsson *Mycenaean Origin of Greek Myth* (Berkeley, 1932) pp. 26, 40ff., 132. *CIG* 4, no. 493. C. Tsountas *Ephem* (1892) 67. Dr. Antony Raubitschek has very kindly taken the trouble to estimate the date of this inscription for me. C. Robert *Gr. Heldensage* (Berlin, 1920) 1, p. 237. E. Kühnert s.v. "Perseus" in Roscher's *Lex.* 3,2 pp. 2018, 2024-5.

<sup>53</sup> Paus. 2,18,1. Frazer's comment on this: 1,572; 3,187.

<sup>54</sup> Paus. 2,15,4. Ktesias *Pseudo-Plut. de fluu.* 18,6 states that "Mycenae" comes from the "μυκηθμός" of the Gorgon. C. Ziegler s.v. "Gorgo" *RE* 7, p. 1634. M. Nilsson *Min-Myc. Rel.* (Lund, 1950) p. 490. Paus. 2,16,3 also tells us that Mycenae was founded on the site where Perseus dropped his scabbard on its rounded end, "μύκης," or ate a mushroom, also "μύκης."

<sup>55</sup> Paus. 2,18,1; 2,21,5. C. Robert *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 52) 1, p. 237. M. Nilsson *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 52) p. 42.

<sup>56</sup> Soph. *Ant.* 944ff. Paus. 2,23,7.

representing the beneficence of Zeus in replenishing the barrenness of the Argive land as symbolized by Danae whom they regarded as an old Earth Goddess. It does not seem necessary to look so far afield for the answer. Apparently the myth-maker was faced with the problem of having Danae conceive without realizing it and so solved the problem by this playful bit of ingenuity that almost seems like a sophisticated parody of Zeus's amours in various animal disguises.<sup>57</sup>

On the basis of such evidence, therefore, Robert, De Ridder, Kühnert, and others regarded Perseus as a hero of the Mycenaean age. Nilsson went so far as to state that this Gorgon-Perseus myth represented "perhaps the best instance of a folk-tale received into Greek heroic mythology,"<sup>58</sup> adding that it was so crowded with folk-tale motifs that this was in some measure proof of a high antiquity. True, this elaboration may have taken a long time to evolve, but there also seems reason to suppose that it took place over a relatively brief period in which additional motifs accrued rapidly.

It seems very significant, moreover, that even though Perseus or his name may have arisen in Mycenaean times, the myth itself does not seem to have been important before the 8th or even early 7th century. Homer, for example, barely mentions Perseus, and is quite silent about his Mycenaean-Argive connections. Now, if we contrast this knowledge with the fact that the young dramatist Aeschylus had sufficient material to compose a whole tetralogy on the subject, it would seem that the myth had reached its full development within that interval, which is to say, that in that period all the events essen-

tial to a full biography of the hero had finally been fitted together.<sup>59</sup> In evolving such a complex set of parts, inquiries naturally had had to be made as to places of "origin," and "sources." Consequently, and for reasons now obscure, Mycenae was apparently given the honor of having been the place of Perseus' origins. When a myth is not distinguished from history, those who believe in it must necessarily also believe that its hero must be identified with a given locality, just as in the case with any real hero of history. But such reification, an euhemeristic *need* for "tradition," should not be confused with actual tradition. Furthermore, while it is only natural for the events of a given myth to cluster about certain geographical localities, this indicates merely that those particular sites, for specific reasons *lent* themselves to the *development* of the myth; it does not mean necessarily that their inhabitants *originated* it.

It seems, therefore, that there is no certain and not even partially satisfactory evidence that the Perseus-Gorgon myth is of Mycenaean origin, either as to time or place. It is possible, of course, that the essential core, the decapitation episode, may have been created at an early period, left in cultural hibernation for several centuries, and then been suddenly revived and developed as it appealed to the needs of the times. But then in that case, one may question the importance of a hero and his myth that thus lies fallow and plays no active role in the culture of a people. The fact that one can raise such a question at all is virtually to challenge the very existence of such a myth, for how can we say that a thing of the imagination exists if it be not in the mind, if it be not vitalized by usage?

In the case of this particular myth, what we are sure of is that it scarcely appears before the second half of the 7th century, when it suddenly arises simultaneously throughout Greece. Prior to that time, literary references are scanty and indicate none of the complexity of episode that eventually evolved around the central act of decapitation. In addition, the monuments show a singular lack of artistic formulation both as to the face and form of the Gorgon; they can only be described as experiments with a new concept. That concept arose within a peasant

<sup>57</sup> C. Robert *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 52) I, p. 229. W. Otto *Die Götter Griechenlands* (Bonn, 1929) pp. 42ff. It was probably indicative of his golden conception that Perseus was sometimes represented with a halo of golden rays. A. Dumont *Monuments grecs* 1#7 (1878) pp. 15ff., pl. 2. L. Séchan *Études sur la tragédie grecque* (Paris, 1926) pp. 111ff. M. Milne *BMMA* Jan. 1946, pp. 126ff. also points out the statement of Nock that Homer describes a supernatural light around the heads of fighting heroes: *Il.* 5.4ff.; 18.205ff.

<sup>58</sup> M. Nilsson *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 52) p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> For the possible dating of this tetralogy see "Illustrations to Aeschylus Tetralogy on the Perseus Theme" *AJA* 57 (1953) 269.

society to which a fear of aggressive animal forces was natural.

Yet even that fear of animals had a more particular aspect, which can be shown by observing the use Perseus made of the Gorgon-head. It is significant that the hero did not turn it against kings and tyrants for personal aggrandizement. Popular imagination in that age of tyrants did not create such a fellow-creature in order to allow him to become the supreme Tyrant, even though he had the perfect means in his hands. Instead, with this head Perseus turned to stone Phineus, the suitor of Andromeda, who refused to surrender her to the hero after the latter had saved her from the sea-monster. He also raised it against Polydektes who desired Perseus' mother against her will.

This point becomes more significant when we see that the hero also used the Gorgon-head against the satyr-followers of Dionysos. As the

frenetic religion of this god first reached Argos, the stronghold of Perseus, the hero and local citizens waged a great battle in opposition.<sup>60</sup> The enemy was defeated when the satyrs were turned to stone at the sight of the lethal head. In contrast to this method of slaughter, the maenads among Dionysos' followers were put to death by the sword by Perseus, according to Pausanias and one of Nonnos' two accounts. In his other version Nonnos says that the women, like the satyrs, were also slain by the head. However, as Robert and Kretschmer state, there is reason to believe that the execution of the women by the sword was the older of the two traditions, which is substantiated by a black-figure painting of Perseus thrusting a sword at a maenad (pl. 36, fig. 7).<sup>61</sup> In contrast, in two paintings of the end of the 5th century, Perseus displays the head to satyrs collapsing in death (pl. 36, fig. 8).<sup>62</sup>

In any case, the point is clear that in the hands of Perseus the Gorgon-head was used against those of wanton intent toward his be-

<sup>60</sup> Paus. 2,20,4; 2,22,1; 2,23,7. Nonnos *D.* 25, 105ff.; 47, 499-612, 666.

<sup>61</sup> P. Kretschmer "Zwei Perseus-Sagen auf attischen Vasen" *JDAI* 7 (1892) 33, 36. J. De Witte *GazArch* 1 (1875) 113-114, pl. 29. De Witte calls the women "Gorgons" but they are plainly maenads as Kretschmer recognized, pp. 33ff. and F. Knatz *AA* 7 (1892) 74.

<sup>62</sup> E. Curtius "Herakles der Satyr und Dreifüssräuber" *Winckelmannsprog.* #12 (1852). S. Reinach-Millingen *Peintures de vases antiques* (Paris, 1891) p. 94. J. Millingen pl. 3. J. Millingen *Peintures antiques et inédites de vases grecs* (Rome, 1813) pl. 3. F. Inghirami *Monumenti Etruschi* (Fiesole, 1824) 5, pt. 1, pl. 43. O. Jahn *Philologus* 27 (1868) pl. 1 p. 1ff. Since there are satyrs represented in these two paintings, it has been suggested that they were inspired by some satyr-play. If so, it was an unusual satyr-play for the scene is one of morbid earnestness, without a touch of humor. It can only be offered here as a suggestion, since evidence is totally lacking, that it may have been Euripides who favored this theme for such a satyr-play. Although he was moved to write the *Bacchae* about 406-7 B.C. during his visit to Macedonia, it does not seem presumptuous to assume that this poet must long have had opinions and feelings about this worship. Perhaps he may have already formulated some of these ideas which dealt with that portion of the myth relating to Perseus and Dionysos in just such a satyr-play, as a kind of preliminary expression. The vase paintings themselves are from the period 420 B.C. or a little later, but it is doubtful that they are late enough to have been contemporary with the production of the *Bacchae* itself. If the theme be overly grim for the usual satyr-play, it may

not have seemed so to the author of the *Alcestis*, that "tragic-comedy" which served in lieu of the usual light satyr-play.

<sup>63</sup> It is probably for this same reason that in the early period Perseus did not use the Gorgon-head against Ketos, the mother of the Gorgon, who was attacking Andromeda. A Corinthian vase painting of the middle of the 6th century B.C., our oldest illustration and reference to the Andromeda episode, shows Perseus hurling stones at Ketos, the sea-beast, while the heroine supplies him with ammunition. K. Robert *AZ* 36 (1878) 16. *MonInst* 10 (1878) pl. 52,1. Even vase paintings of the 4th century still depict Perseus using only the harpe or a lance. A. Furtwängler *AA* 8 (1893) 93 #57. R. Engelmann *JDAI* 19 (1904) 144, fig. 1. L. Séchan *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 57) p. 261, fig. 78. Amphora of Canossa: H. Heydemann *Vasens. des Mus. Naz. Neapel* #3225; *Mem. dell' Accad. Ercol.* 9 (1862) pl. 5. L. Séchan *op. cit.* (*supra* n. 57) p. 259, pl. 6. *MonInst* 9 (1872) pl. 38. S. Reinach *Rép. des vases peints grecs et étrusques* 1. (Paris, 1899) p. 188. Compare these with the fragments of one from Ruvo which probably had a similar arrangement of the scene in three registers: R. Engelmann *JDAI* 19 (1904) pl. 9. There is an interesting parallel here between Perseus and Beowulf. Just as Beowulf slew Grendel and later the monster's mother, so the Greek hero slew Ketos, Medusa's mother. Perhaps popular imagination wished to make doubly sure and provided for the destruction of the source, the mother, as well.

loved Danae and Andromeda and, secondly, against the equally lewd forces of Dionysos.<sup>63</sup> From the former usage it is evident that one more facet has evolved in the development of the Gorgon and her baneful head: the sight of her has no effect on women, but all men who look on her are rendered impotent, turned to stone in the poetic language of myth. The development is logical. The generalized, primitive fear of animals is converted by an urban society into a more intimate fear, in the guise of a Gorgon who renders a man frigid as stone and unmans him. Gradually the development reached its logical end when the Gorgon her-

self was transformed into the beautiful and tragic Medusa of downcast gaze. The second usage, against the followers of Dionysos, indicates that a moral development has also taken place: Olympian Order, won by enormous spiritual struggle and represented in this myth by Perseus, is now opposed to the unbridled ecstasy of the rites of the Thracian. Once again as hero, with his Argives, he repels the Dionysiac threat. Against it Perseus uses the force that can intimidate the host of the god: the Gorgon-head.

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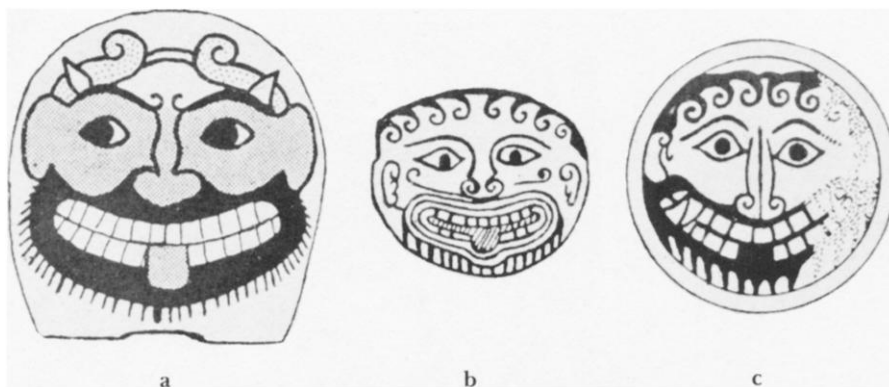


FIG. 1. PROTCORINTHIAN GORGONEIA



FIG. 2. BOEOTIAN CENTAUR-GORGON AND PERSEUS



FIG. 3. RHODIAN GORGON-ARTEMIS



FIG. 4. GORGON FROM CORCYRA



FIG. 5. FACE OF HUMBABA



FIG. 6. GILGAMESH SLAYING HUMBABA



FIG. 7. PERSEUS SLAYING MAENADS

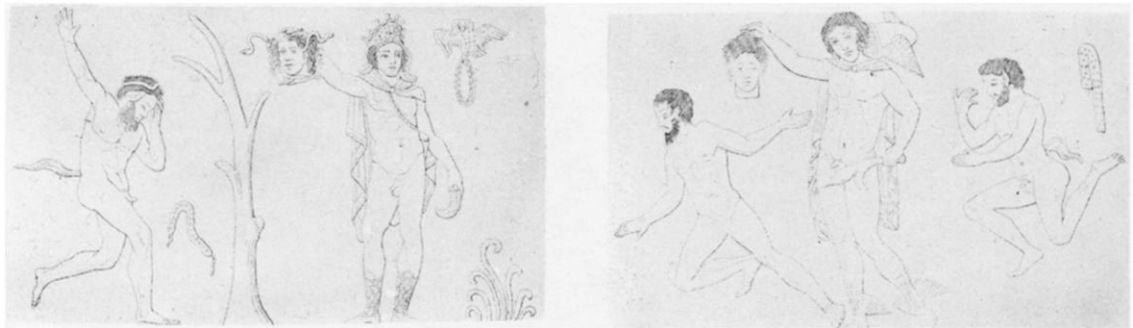


FIG. 8. PERSEUS SLAYING SATYRS